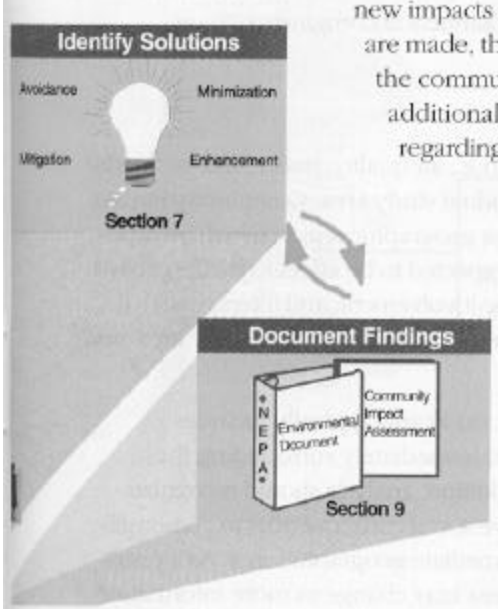
Document Findings

In addition to oral presentations, present the findings of the community impact assessment in written form for use by decisionmakers, to record findings, to disseminate to interested parties, and to support subsequent decisions (Section 9).

Iterative Process

Communities are dynamic and constantly changing. As options change, the analyst must make appropriate re-evaluations and adjustments in findings, particularly if there are substantial time lapses in project development.

Although the steps in the community impact assessment process are logically sequential, they overlap in practice. The assessment process is iterative in the sense that analysts must be prepared to revisit prior steps and be aware of future steps in conducting the assessment. In the early steps, when helping to frame the project and community profile, analysts must think about the probable relationships between the project and community so that relevant data are collected. Later, if new impacts are identified or decisions are made, the analyst must go back to the community profile and gather additional information or data regarding populations affected.



The Community Impact Assessment Process

PROCESS

2. Defining the Project

Project Identification

What is the role of the community impact analyst in defining the project?

Community impact analysts should take a strong role in defining the project in the early phases of project development. Based on their understanding of community values and issues, analysts should take an active role in:

- Providing input into a project's purpose and need.
- Developing project alternatives.

Although transportation planners and engineers traditionally have controlled this process, community impact analysts should fully participate along with designers and other environmentalists. Analysts should contribute to developing project alternatives, suggesting new options based on preliminary indications of likely community issues and special areas to avoid. These alternatives come from a different perspective so they may be very different from those of transportation planners and engineers.

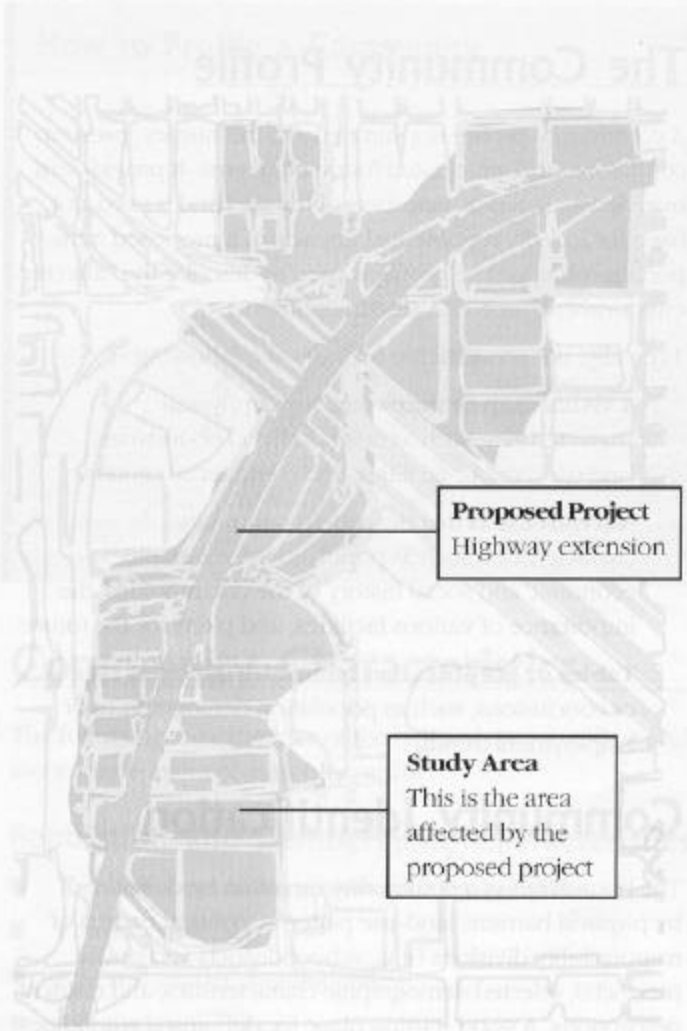
Study Area

What is the scope of the geographic area to be examined?

Each technical analysis (i.e., air quality, traffic, and wetlands) may have its own individual study area. Community impact analysts should identify a geographic region which incorporates the communities expected to be affected by the project based on scoping, public involvement, and interagency coordination. This should include the project study area, and may extend beyond it.

The community impact study area typically includes communities within and immediately surrounding the project study area. In addition, analysts should recognize that the project may have social consequences to communities well beyond the immediate geographic area. As a result, the community study area may change as more information is collected and engineering variations are introduced.

Public Involvement provides important input to help define a project's study area, substantiate its purpose and need, and supply information for developing project alternatives which address identified needs.



3. Developing a Community Profile

The Community Profile

What is a community profile?

A community profile is a summary of the history, present conditions, and anticipated future of an area. It provides an overview or series of snapshots of the area and is used as a basis for identifying potential impacts of a proposed transportation action. The profile is used to describe the "affected environment" in NEPA documentation.

Typically, the presentation includes the following:

A visual map or maps that depict physical characteristics, such as neighborhood boundaries, land uses, public facilities, and commercial centers.

Narrative text that describes community characteristics, such as population demographics, economic and social history of the communities, the importance of various facilities, and plans for the future.

Tables or graphics that summarize important data or conclusions, such as population demographics or employment trends.

Community Identification

How do you identify communities?

The boundaries of a community can often be delineated by physical barriers, land-use patterns, political or area of responsibility divisions (e.g., school districts and police precincts), selected demographic characteristics, and resident perceptions. A good starting place for defining communities for the project is the already-defined neighborhoods which are typically recognized by name and/or tradition.

The analyst should be aware of other boundaries and consider impacts based on those boundaries (e.g., school

districts and project impacts on student populations; and fire districts and project impacts on response times). Subcommunities should also be identified, as well as stratifications within a community, based on economic or demographic characteristics.

How to Profile a Community

Define community boundaries, and neighborhood or subdivision boundaries.

Locate the businesses, residences, and activity centers of potential impact, especially within neighborhoods along the highway alternatives and near interchanges.

Determine demographic characteristics, economic base, location of community facilities, and other characteristics.

Learn about a community within the study area by comparing local or area population demographics, land use, and other characteristics with State or regional information.

Continually refine the profile throughout the assessment process as impacts are identified and as situations change over time.

Community Characteristics

How do you profile a community?

The following are examples of the types of data to collect and incorporate into a community profile.

Population and Demographic Characteristics

- Trends in population growth and demographics
- Ethnicity and race
- Age and gender distributions
- Income levels
- Educational attainment
- Employment status
- Special population subgroups, such as disabled populations
- Indian tribal governments, as appropriate

Economic and Social History/Characteristics

- Community historical background and context
- Community values and issues (e.g., security and solitude)
- Economic base (e.g., agriculture, manufacturing, and service)
- Property values
- Tax base
- Other economic characteristics (e.g., port city, tourism base, and lumber town)

Physical Characteristics Relating to Community Activities

- Community centers/activity centers
- Infrastructure (e.g., roads, transit, and water and sewage systems)
- Public services and facilities (e.g., schools, police, fire, libraries, and hospitals)
- Land-use plans and zoning
- Special areas, historic districts, and parklands
- Businesses
- Housing (availability, age, and type)
- Planned and approved future development
- Community focal points or informal meeting places (e.g., places of worship, playgrounds, hair salons, and laundromats)

Initially, information collection involves gathering general information. As potential impacts are identified later in the process, analysts collect additional data on the community that is targeted to specific needs. The following section of this guidebook describes the process for collecting data and identifies some key information sources.

4. Collecting Data

Gathering Information

What should be considered when collecting data about a community?

Gathering data can be expensive and time consuming. Analysts should identify what data are needed for their specific purpose and are readily available. In many cases, in-house staff have expertise; and in larger communities, various planning agencies and councils of government have information that can easily be obtained. Another source may be other projects' files or earlier attempts at the current project, which may then be updated. If information is not available from traditional sources, analysts must be resourceful in seeking out alternative sources.

When collecting information, it is important to recognize when data were collected, the data sources used, and data reliability. Analysts should use the most up-to-date data available, understand the basic assumptions used in each compilation, and recognize the purposes for which data were originally collected.

Sources of Information

Where can data be found?

The following (on the next page) are examples of data sources and their typical uses. (Refer to Section 3 for the types of information typically included in the profile.) Other sources may be available, so analysts should not limit themselves to these items.

Public Involvement can serve as a source of information to identify community values and needs, to explore the importance of community facilities and resources, to identify those facilities not previously noted, and to validate information collected from other sources.

What are some data sources?

Contact Points

Source	Primary Uses
Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)	Economic base, land-use and zoning plans, and area planning history
State and local government planning and social service departments/agencies	Economic base, land-use and zoning plans, taxing districts, social and economic programs, and business and marketing information
State employment agencies or labor departments	Employment trends, unemployment rates, and economic base
State, local, and university libraries (for local newspaper clippings and other local sources)	General information, community historical background, economic base, and business and marketing information
Local historical societies and State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO)	Community historical background, and location of historic structures, landmarks, and districts
Other relevant data collection organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce, religious institutions, American Automobile Association (AAA), Meals-on-Wheels, American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), social agencies, and other associations	Special populations and needs, businesses, community issues, etc.

Data Collections and Activities

Source	Primary Uses
Census Bureau publications and statistical abstracts	Population trends and demographics, economic indicators, and housing
Aerial maps and road maps	Community boundaries and physical characteristics; location of activity centers, infrastructure, houses, and businesses
Field or windshield surveys and reviews	Locations and number of structures, and activity patterns
Yellow Pages or city directories	Businesses and community facility locations and type
Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) databases	Business location, type, and number of employees
Donnelley Directory (available on CD-ROM)	Business location, type, and number of employees
Tax records	Property values
Building-permit records	Approved or built development
Real estate market surveys, regional real estate journals, and interviews with realtors	Housing prices, trends in sales, age or characteristics of structures, and neighborhood composition
Interviews and public involvement with businesses, community leaders, and residents	Community values and issues

How should information be gathered on households, population, and demographics

Developing Part of a Profile

After identifying community boundaries, the analyst often begins the community profile by describing basic population and demographic characteristics. In order to gather this information, the analyst might:

- Consult the MPO, city/county, or statewide planning offices.
- Examine statistical abstracts and publications from the U.S. Census Bureau.
- Update demographic statistics based on projected growth rates.
- Conduct a field survey to pinpoint specific neighborhoods, residential subdivisions, and properties, and to identify new residential developments.
- Consult with schools, social service agencies, or community organizations to obtain more specific local information, such as the number of school-age children in specific neighborhoods, households receiving public assistance, and residents with membership in religious institutions.

Early in the process, the analyst should collect general data that is necessary to describe the study area. As potential impacts to particular households or neighborhoods are identified, the analyst should collect specific, targeted data.